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SUN HERALD

RAINS COULD PRODUCE MOLD

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Illustration:

Info box: Mold Facts

Caption: Mold facts:

Stachybotrys (stak-e-bo-trus) atra is a deadly form of mold that causes bleeding of the lungs.

The bleeding is caused by toxins released from the mold that weaken blood vessels in the lungs of infants. This condition is further irritated by exposure to cigarette smoke.

Those with developing lungs, children and infants, are the most susceptible to the mold. Symptoms of toxic exposure are coughing up blood and frequent nosebleeds in infants.

Detection and removal:

Stachybotrys can grow in homes where there has been water damage from flooding, plumbing or roof leaks. It thrives in the water-soaked fibers of building materials such as drywall, insulation, gypsum board and ceiling tile. The fungus is greenish-black in color and is slimy.

If discovered, clean the area with a solution of one cup of bleach and one gallon of water and ventilate.

While cleaning, wear a dust mask, goggles and rubber gloves to avoid contact with the skin.

After disinfecting and cleaning, dry surfaces quickly using fans, dehumidifiers or natural ventilation.

Anyone who participated in cleanup should shower thoroughly when done.

It's black, slimy and potentially lethal and it could be growing in your home.

The *Stachybotrys atra* mold is able to find a foothold in water-damaged homes or businesses that have left a wet, dank environment, and a public health official warns it is a deadly tenant.

"Mold in general can cause problems for people with allergies, but this particular one is dangerous for infants," cautioned Joe Fahner with the Mississippi State Department of Public Health. "Pulmonary hemorrhaging can occur with infants who are exposed to it."

Fahner, a surveillance specialist who collects data on hazardous substances, saw his first and only specimen of the mold six months ago on the wall of a Clinton business that was damaged by rain water.

No health problems were reported by the owner or employees, but the threat of this fungus is not only for children. It can create havoc for adults as well.

"I had a persistent hacking cough to the point that it was almost like bronchitis. I generally don't get that even during the flu season," said Jamie Munson, 24, of Grand Forks, N.D., who became exposed to *Stachybotrys* when her parents' basement flooded this past spring.

"After they cleaned up and closed up the basement, I haven't had any symptoms since. Personally, I feel that it was related to the mold."

The effects on adults are not as serious as those on babies. Most people who come into harmful contact with the fungus experience flu-like symptoms or develop rashes.

Two years ago, 30 children in Cleveland, Ohio, became vulnerable to the mold after a massive rainstorm flooded much of the area. Nine children died before doctors discovered a link between their exposure to the mold and to cigarette smoke.

Research is ongoing, but an investigation by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention suggests toxins from the indoor mold irritate the lining of infants' lungs, weakening developing blood vessels. This eventually leads to bleeding of the lungs. Tobacco smoke in the environment further increases an infant's risk of pulmonary hemorrhage, the report said.

Homes along the Coast that experienced flooding or water damage as a result of Hurricane Georges are at risk of developing the fungus if precautions are not taken, Fahner said. However, the threat of exposure can be greatly reduced with fast action, he added.

"If people react quickly and dry things out, it has less of a chance to grow than

if they wait around to clean up," he said. "I would advise them to dry the house out as quickly as possible. Any items that can't be dried out should be disposed of."

The fungus thrives on water-soaked cellulose fibers in building materials such as insulation, dry wall, gypsum and ceiling tile.

Roy Burst, the owner of Building Inspection Services of Metairie, La., has seen his share of flood damage and mold that has made its home on materials that were not dried sufficiently.

He said if homes have more than 2 inches of water in the house, it's a sure bet that water made its way inside the wall cavity. If the wall has insulation, the cure will be costly.

The only way to ensure that mold will not grow inside the wall is to remove the drywall and replace the insulation, Burst said. Those walls without insulation can be cleaned then allowed to dry, which can take anywhere from two weeks to three months depending on the type of materials inside the house.

Burst said of the two evils, a house flooded with saltwater would fare much better than one soaked in freshwater.

"You don't get the bacteria with saltwater that you do with freshwater," he explained. "The best thing in the world is to be flooded with saltwater . . . if you had to be flooded." Meredith Hartley is a reporter from the Ledger-Enquirer in Columbus, Ga.

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